

6204 (3)
A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT
THE FIVE FIELDS CHAPEL,
IN THE PARISH OF
ST. GEORGE, HANOVER-SQUARE,
BEFORE THE
ANCIENT AND HONOURABLE FRATERNITY
OF
FREE and ACCEPTED MASONS;
ON

Wednesday, the 24th of June, 1772,

BEING
THE FESTIVAL OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST;
BY
The Rev. Mr. JOHN GOWER;

And published at the particular Request of
THE BRETHREN OF THE UNITED LODGES,
UNDER THE SANCTION OF
SIR ROBERT STEWERT.

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A
S E R M O N.

EPHESIANS V. 8.

Walk as Children of Light.

IT is recorded in the 18th and 19th Chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, that St. Paul planted a church at Ephesus, the metropolis of Asia Minor, where he preached the Gospel, during the space of three years, with success; but, hearing that the Jews were desirous of drawing the Christians to submit to their rites, he thought it necessary to address the Ephesians, and some other churches; setting forth, how great the power of the Gospel was unto

salvation, beyond all other doctrines ; and how all the counsels of God, through every age, tended to its advancement : and this he does in noble and sublime expressions, suitable to the unfearchable wisdom and goodness of God, shewn to us in the work of redemption.

BEING informed that the Ephesians stood firm in the faith, our Apostle, in this Epistle, congratulates them on their steadiness and perseverance ; and, as a stronger confirmation of their faith, he gives them more exalted views of the eternal love of God, and of the glorious excellencè and dignity of Christ.

HE likewise reminds them of the darkness and blindness of their heathenish state ; for before the light of the Gospel shed its divine rays among them, they were not only *dark*, but darkness itself : but as they were now enlightened by the word
and

and spirit of God, he engages them to the practice of those duties that become their *characters*, as children of light; and urges them to walk in a manner suitable to the Christian profession.

It has been the fate, not only of many excellent institutions, but even of Christianity itself, to be arraigned upon the account of the immoral lives of some of its professors. The want of a due attention to the established precepts of any order, has been a scandal to its institution.

BUT the answer to such a charge is plain and obvious; for we may reply, and with propriety, that the truth or value of any order, is no more impaired by the ill use which men make of it, than the Sun ceases to shine, when we shut our eyes to the beams of that glorious luminary.

To

To illustrate the precept of the text more clearly, it is my design to consider it under the three following heads, viz. "Of doing justly; loving mercy; and walking humbly with God:" and then to subjoin some reflections, suitable, perhaps, to the solemnity of the day.

IF then, my brethren, we are ambitious of walking as children of light, we must do justly, love mercy, and practise piety; because the two first comprehend the duties we owe one another, and the last the duties which we owe to God.

WHEN I consider whom I am addressing, I think it unnecessary to trespass much upon your time, by giving you a particular definition of justice; I shall therefore only remind you of some of the principal instances and virtues comprehended under it.

I. FIRST,

I. FIRST then, justice is concerned in the making of such laws as are useful and beneficial for the honour of God and religion, and for the public good of human society. If, in this grand trust, men are biased either by favour or interest, or drawn aside from the consideration and regard of the public good ; the crime is greater, and of more fatal consequence, than any private act of injustice between man and man.

JUSTICE likewise is concerned, not only in the observance and obedience of laws, but also in the due execution of them ; as these are the guard of private property, as well as the security of public peace, religion and good manners.

NAY, justice is the firmest bond of human society ; for upon the observance of it, the peace and happiness of mankind have always depended.

MORE-

MOREOVER, doing justly, implies that we render to "every one their due ; custom to whom custom, tribute ; to whom tribute, honour to whom honour, &c." that we defraud no one, no not even of his good name, but always keep *a tongue of good report*, that speaks as well of our Brother when absent as present ; and yet we should never be enticed to deceive him, but constantly endeavour, both in word and deed, to live as upright men ; acting so much upon the *Square*, and living so much within the *Compass* of our articles, as never by our necessities to be tempted to defraud him of his right. In a word, the whole duty of doing justly, is summed up in the 12th verse of the 7th Chapter of St. MATTHEW ; " Whatsoever you would that men should do unto you, even so do unto them, for this is the law and the prophets."

II. IF we love as Brethren, we shall of consequence be merciful ; and to be compassionate to his fellow-creatures, has ever been the characteristic of a good *Mason*.

LET stoic pride shut up the bowels of mercy, and stop the sluices of compassion. *We* will not be ashamed of the tender sensations of humanity, "To mourn with those that mourn, and weep with those that weep."

WE are informed by the holy Evangelists, that our blessed Saviour upon several occasions shed a sympathizing tear of pity, and his unerring example not only gives us a right to indulge such affections, but teaches us that they are not unwelcome to the mansions of a merciful Father.

IN relieving the necessities of our Brethren, we not only follow the example of our primitive father, but
B exactly

exactly comply with that direction St. PAUL has been pleased to give us, viz. * “ That every man according to his abilities should send relief to the Brethren which dwelt in Judea, and accordingly sent it to the Elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

NAY, we are commanded, as well by the Author of our salvation, as his Apostles, to be full of compassion. It is a duty enjoined by religion, as incumbent on humanity. It is *this* that directs the hand of charity to relieve, and points out to benevolence the objects of assistance. Without *this*, charity is ostentation, and munificence hypocrisy. Moreover, the excellence of this affection is demonstrable, in that it is always found in the most amiable dispositions.

If

• Acts xi. 29, 30.

IF avarice turn the ear from the complaints of poverty, we may naturally conclude, that mercy is a stranger to such an unrelenting heart.

THE usefulness of this virtue to society cannot be disputed : if, as we have observed, it be the source of charity; if it directs us to the relief of misery, and the consolation of distress ; if it “ be feet to the lame, or eyes to the blind ; if its words uphold those that are falling, and if it strengthen the feeble knees.” Its utility is confessed, and it is with indisputable propriety enjoined by the law of religion.

III. To these relative and social virtues, we must ever remember to join that important and bounden duty of “ Walking humbly with God ;” which we shall do, if we always retain a firm belief of his Being, Perfections, and Providence, together
with

with an awful sense of *him*, as the dread Sovereign and righteous Judge of the world, and a due regard to his service by a reverent behaviour of ourselves towards *him*, in all acts of worship and religion.

WE are commanded † “to walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing; being faithful in every good work, and encreasing in the knowledge of God.”

AND according to this phrase, we read that Enoch walked with God ‡. And so again we are told of Noah, that he “was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and that he walked with God.” *

By which expressions it is plainly meant, that they believed in and
feared

† Col. i. 10. ‡ Gen. v. 22.

* Gen. vi. 9.

feared God, and that they endeavoured to serve and please him with all their hearts.

How then ought we to admire and adore the goodness of God, who has brought us out of darkness the of heathenish superstition and idolatry, into the true light of the Gospel of his Son, and hath called us to this state of salvation, according to the Apostle (1 THESSAL. v. 45.) But “ye brethren are not in darkness, ye are all the children of light, and of the day. Walk therefore as children of light.”

BUT farther, “Walking humbly with God,” implies, that we must venerate and adore his infinite perfections, “the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, his judgments that are unsearchable, and his ways that are past finding

finding out.”† In despising all things in respect of God, knowing that when we approach him, we should “abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes.”* In renouncing our best works, and attributing them not unto ourselves, but to the inspirations of his Divine Spirit, and the assistance of his especial Grace, saying, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give the praise, for thy loving mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.” ‡ In thinking no duty below us for the spiritual welfare of our Christian Brethren, but “in becoming all things to all men, that by any means we may gain some; § “in lowliness of mind, each esteeming another better than himself.”† In bearing the reproaches and injuries of bad men with patience, the just reproofs of our friends with thankfulness, and our afflictions with an entire resignation,

† Rom. xi. 33.

* Jos. lxii. 6.

‡ Psalm cxv. i.

§ 1 Cor. ix. 22.

† Phill. ii. 2.

tion, and submission, as knowing ourselves to be offenders under the hands of justice. In a word, walking humbly with God, implies such "a poverty of spirit," as will make us form our actions and wills entirely according to the directions of God revealed to mankind in his holy word.

SUCH then, my Brethren, is the importance of the precept of the text, and such are the duties contained in it, that we must invariably practise them if we are desirous either of adorning the order to which we belong ; or of securing ourselves that happiness which is kept in reversion for faithful servants among the regions of never-ending bliss.

LET us, therefore, reflect that as the operative Masons erect his building according to the designs laid down by the architect ; so ought we, to raise our spiritual building, according to the designs laid down for us
by

by the Grand Architect of the universe in the book of life, the Holy Bible.

IN performing his work, the Mason frequently tries every minute part of it by the *Compass*, *Square*, *Level*; and *Plumb-rule*, in order to give to each member its true and exact proportion; in like manner should we constantly try every minute action of our lives, whether it will *square* with God's word; whether it is *level* with his commands; whether it is upright, according to the *plumb-rule* of conscience, and within the *compass* of innocence.

WHEREVER we find our actions in a direct and parallel line with the precepts of the Gospel of Christ, we may assure ourselves we are raising such a spiritual building, as will be acceptable to God, and will prove to us the noblest of mansions. "An
house

house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." But wherever we find them not in a straight and upright line with the Gospel: but "starting aside like a broken bow," we must there correct and amend them; and take good care not to permit the like errors for the future to spoil the harmony and proportion of the whole.

WE must let no † untempered mortar destroy its firmness, but must build it with duly tempered mortar, so that it may prove a building which may be serviceable to us to all eternity, and shew us to have been true and good Masons, such as will at the last day be *free and accepted* of God: free to the company of our Grand Master, and the good fellowship of his holy angels, and free from the burden of sin, and the dominion of Satan.

C

OF

† Ezek. xiii. 10.

Or all the institutions that have done honour to mankind, those that have been established on the principles of uninterested love and charity are deservedly the most distinguished.

AND I believe I may venture to affirm, that these virtues have never been more heartily cultivated, or more universally diffused in any human order, than in that of Masonry,

NAY, it is the center of union, and has often been the means of conciliating true friendship among men, who, without its attractive power, must even have remained at a perpetual distance.

To become a Mason, is to become an heir of freedom, and a son of benevolence.

BUT then the science is progressive, and not to be attained in any degree
of

of perfection, but by time, patience, application, and industry ; for no one is admitted to the profoundest secret, or the highest honour of this fraternity, till by times we are assured he has learned secresy and morality ; and then, and not till then, he is admitted to participate of all the secrets belonging to this ancient institution.

NOTWITHSTANDING the obloquy and reproach Masonry met with at its first introduction into some places, it has spread itself into the most distant parts of the world ; and now from East to West, between North and South, there is scarce a nation, people, or kingdom among whom a Lodge has not been held. And surely there must have been some laudable motive to induce men thus to propagate and spread abroad this science. There must have been somewhat more than barely a desire of partaking of a *Secret*. There must have been some no-

bler inducement for persons of the greatest sense and religion, as well as rank, not only to be members of this society, but also to endeavour to enhance its credit, as well as increase its numbers.

THE very constitutions and principles of it, bind its members to the strictest justice; they prescribe sobriety and moderation; they teach men that they must *subdue their passions*, and acquaint them that they must abstain from every thing ludicrous, or of ill report.

IN fine, they enjoin us “ to pay due respect to all men, to love the brotherhood, to fear God, and to honour the king.”

SINCE then, my Brethren, you are governed by such wholesome *Laws*,
let

let your lives correspond with that purity which they enforce.

CONSIDER, that you are brought out of *darkness into light*. "Let, therefore, that light which is in you so shine before all men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven."

LET the *whiteness of the cloathing*, wherein you now appear, prove a true emblem of your inward purity and innocence ; *let it be to you the badge of innocence, and the bond of friendship* : Those *jewels*, the badges of honour, and tokens to what master you belong, wherewith you are now adorned, always put you in mind of that jewel of great price * which you are bound to purchase, even with the sale of all that you have.

AND

* Matt. xiii. 46.

AND, let the regularity, sobriety, and piety, of your lives, shew, that you walk humbly with God.

LET your justice and mercy, your integrity and charity to all men, prove, that good Masons are cloathed with humility, and adorned with good works ; and, in all things, act worthy of the name of Christ : Then shall all they, who have spoken evil of you, as of evil doers, seeing your good works, be ashamed of having falsely accused your good conversation in Christ ; and, then shall they perceive, that Masonry is founded and raised on such pillars as shall never fail ; for this will prove, that it is contrived with the wisdom which is pure, gentle, easy to be intreated ; full of good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy ; supported with the *strength* of sound reason, assisted by Revelation, so as to be able to confound

found all its adversaries ; and to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ‡ ; and adorned even with the *beauty of holiness* itself §.

CONSEQUENTLY Masonry is built on that sure rock, against which let the waves and billows of temporal persecution never so strongly dash, it will stand erect and secure, because that rock is Christ.

‡ Psalm xxv. 2.

§ Peter ii. 15.

F I N I S.

found all its advantages; and to get
for these the ignorance of foolish
men; and adorned even with the
array of science itself.

Consequently, Manly is built
on that rock, against which the
waves and billows of temporal
power dash in vainly, and
will stand fast and secure, because
its rock is Christ.

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LODGES.

L O D G E S.

ST. ANDREW'S LODGE, in Newport-Market, is held on the First Thursday in the Month.

ST. JOHN'S LODGE, at the Bedford-Head, Maiden-Lane, is held on the Third Thursday.

ST. DAVID'S LODGE, at the Ship, in the Strand, is held on the Third Wednesday.

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ST. PETER'S LODGE, in Little Newport-Street, is held on the Last Thursday.